

moting radical societal change, public opinion and context play a critical role.

The relationship between policy-makers who promote radical change and citizens is not an easy one. In democracies, policies should obtain broad approval from the population, but it could be a struggle to achieve this for radical policies. Should academics and policy-makers therefore impose solutions in a top-down manner claiming that they are acting in the interests of their citizens? The risk of sounding elitist and detached from public opinion then lies just around the corner. But there are examples in history of cases where public opinion has changed abruptly and policies that had been perceived as radical were subsequently accepted by the wider public. So, hope for radical policies exists even where it might be unexpected, and where citizens seem not particularly receptive to change.

What does Jackson imply with the term 'dream' in the title of the book? The 'Manifesto for a Dream' refers to the American dream – the belief that everyone can make it in life and fulfil their life aspirations regardless of their social background or where they come from. However, this is not a reality in the contemporary United States. This dream seems even further from reality in the current world impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, schools are an important social institution that supports the learning of children. The current absence or virtual format of this institution places a higher burden on parents and children. In this situation, the learning gap between vulnerable and privileged children is set to increase and thereby generate long-term inequalities. The disparity in the support children receive in home-schooling is critical, and this is coupled with distress caused by economic deprivation and exposure to health hazards, which are currently exacerbated by this major shock. This crisis is set to leave a major scar on future generations and radical poli-

cies are needed to allow the wound to heal and reduce social inequalities. To achieve this aim, social scientists need to be bold, do research, and promote ideas that can address the inequalities of constraints, and thereby help build the social institutions that will effectively change the social structure.

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Marsha Siefert (ed.): *Labor in State-Socialist Europe, 1945-1989: Contributions to a History of Work*

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While the scholarship on global labour has increasingly broken beyond the confines of the Western-European meta-narrative of progress [Strath and Wagner 2017], the study of labour in the 'Eastern Bloc' has remained conspicuously under-theorised (pp. 4–5) [on the labour transition, however, see Vanhuysse 2007, 2008]. Building on the fashionable scholarly trend on transnational history in labour studies [Hofmeister and van der Linden 2018], this volume offers a bottom-top approach that unpacks 'Sovietisation' as 'an internal negotiation among the hierarchies of labor as they intersect local communist party membership and goals' (p. 11). Across 17 dense chapters the volume covers a diverse range of topics pertaining to the organisation of labour: creating a socialist workforce (Part I); enshrining rights and establishing discipline (Part II); managing safety and risk (Part III); the unrest and reform (Part IV).

Broadly speaking, the book aims to go above and beyond existing studies and strive for a holistic take on agency, whereby 'an everyday life perspective' not only centralises the factory but also 'encompasses and emphasizes promises and prac-

tics away from the shop floor' (p. 13). This broader view is better suited to capturing the gap between communist parties' macro-level developmental goals and the on-site reality of factory managers dealing with the non-homogenous historical legacies of late industrialisation. Against this background, the crux of the book is uncovering why and how, crucial top-down levers of organising and managing labour were circumvented by workers, with the management's tacit acknowledgement (p. 16). By drawing on previous studies that had centralised the role of agency (p. 13), the main argument, which gives coherence to the breadth of individual case studies, is that labour laws, employment contracts, and social welfare policies and benefits were essentially derived by means of 'negotiation from below' (pp. 13–16). In this sense, virtually all the contributors show that studying labour in state socialism requires a disentangling of how 'material conditions and everyday instrumentalities' warped the "choices and dilemmas of those participating at various levels in the labor hierarchy' (p. 12).

While the emphasis of the book is on worker agency, the individual chapters essentially offer a complex analysis of the constitutive relationship between actors, structure, and process in shaping state-labour interactions. The list of contributors contains an impressive array of well-established scholars. Let me here provide an overview of two chapters devoted to communist Romania so as to better highlight the main conceptual threads among the various facets of the state-labour relationships that pertain to a single variation of 'state socialism'. Alina-Sandra Cucu shows in detail that in the early 1950s, Romanian communists deployed a discursive strategy that blended economic and socio-political considerations; however 'failing to generate surplus weakened not only the factory, but also the polity' (p. 50). Against this background, the socialist transformation

implied that the 1950s Romanian worker had to be simultaneously created 'as a producer and as a political subject' (p. 51). Forging the ideal worker – a 'Stakhanovite' who embraced over-production as the social duty of the political individual – could buttress a substantively different and much faster economic transformation than Taylorism (p. 54). In this sense, Stakhanovites provided an answer to the long-standing question of catch-up development in a (semi)peripheral country that lacked the structures and contingencies typically associated with Western capitalist development (p. 54). Against this background, Stakhanovites were elevated discursively and ideationally as *the* embodiment of socialist construction in the form of a modernising project at the factory level (p. 55).

At the same time, however, by zooming in on the leather and footwear factory in early 1950s Cluj, Cucu shows that creating Stakhanovites was not at all a straightforward process (p. 52). The creation of new workers could bypass the need to manage existing workers (p. 57), nor evade the tricky legacy of late industrialisation, wherein the putative benefits of Stakhanovism were not at all apparent to the masses of peasant-workers, unskilled workers, and commuters whom the communist authorities were trying to 'elevate' (p. 64). In addition, Romanian management quickly realised that the Soviet handbook on forging Stakhanovists involved unsustainable costs and equipment that was simply not available (p. 59). This meant that, despite claims to the contrary in reports from the 1950s, Stakhanovites did not 'organically emerge' but had to be made through a type of proactive top-down strategy (p. 62).

Yet, given the ubiquitous lack of resources, the creation of 'new socialist workers', as officially sanctioned by the first Five-Year Plan in 1951, had to rely on an intricate balancing act (pp. 59–61). This was necessary because creating Stakhanovists

depended not just on incentivising individuals but also on generating an environment conducive to this outcome, where every (technical and human) cog in the wheel played a specific role (p. 62). Specifically, managers had to negotiate between the top-down demands for Stakhanovists, the limited tools they had at their disposal (which mostly involved ‘shaming’ slackers – p. 61), the piecework system that allowed would-be Stakhanovists to thrive and the inherent tensions this upward mobility generated between existing high-skill workers and apparent ‘unworthy profiteers’ of the new opportunity structure (pp. 63–64). The latter was particularly problematic, as the Communist Party’s over-emphasis on a ‘pedagogic project’ geared towards the individual labourer rather than the working class as a whole often had perverse effects that fractured the solidarity of the emerging labour class (pp. 51–52). Against this backdrop, while Stakhanovism seemed like an appealing way to overcome the constraints of time in late development (pp. 64–68), it ultimately involved a type of factory-floor negotiation that limited its actual productive capacity (p. 64).

Shedding new light on the ‘welfare gestalt’ of socialism (in Kaufmann’s [2013] sense), Grama analyses how policies designed to improve work safety in the 1950s were construed as responses to a ‘crisis of labour productivity’ that threatened vital facets of the socialist economic transformation, such as ‘the need for mechanization, the management’s duty to procure working equipment and the trade unions’ role in better organizing the labor process’ (pp. 251–252). Grama dissects how and why work accidents showed authorities and factory managers alike ‘the interdependence between social insurance, labor markets, working conditions and production practices’ (p. 260). In this sense, the standardisation of work safety policies and the socialisation of risk were designed to create the type of clear-cut delin-

eation of responsibilities ‘between those who controlled the labor process and those who merely performed work’ that allowed the socialist state to use welfare incentives to ‘reduce contingent work and produce stable, skilled and productive workers’ (pp. 248, 251–252). In this line of thought, Grama uses the discrete case of accident and disability pensions as ‘regulatory mechanisms of the labor market’ to argue for the broader point that, in communist Romania, ‘social insurance is constitutive of, rather than external to, the industrial wage relation’ (p. 269) (for a general theory, see Vanhuysse [2006]).

Set against the backdrop of the 1970s global crisis, the Romanian 1977 pension reform overtly sought to ‘put an end to the regime of complicities’ whereby the regulatory role of accident and disability pension was undermined by a range of intermediary factors (pp. 246–248). Specifically, the reform sought to completely curtail the possibility that some injured workers accessed early retirement and specific benefits on the basis of ailments defined in a top-down fashion as ‘illegitimate’ or ‘insufficient’ (p. 247). The crux of the issue was that work accidents had been increasingly conceptualised as a component of labour productivity, which meant that factory-floor bargaining became a virtual developmental hurdle in that it sapped social insurance out of the national budget (pp. 247–248). This can be seen, for instance, in how the 1950s communist authorities started to account for work accidents as ‘wasted working days’ (pp. 250–252). Within the ideational landscape of socialist economic transformation, this practice was supposed to enable management to curtail workers’ attempts to obtain a disability pension (p. 248). By calculating labour productivity as a function of working hours, socialist planners also expected to gain a type of overview with which it would be possible to create a state-wide demand for workers (p. 250).

At the same time however, while the standardisation of practices and required paperwork did yield a modicum of results (pp. 252–254), what soon became obvious was the clash between ambiguous historical legacies and the inconsistent practices of socialist authorities themselves (pp. 255–257). Furthermore, a crucial issue was that while old-age pensions could be used as an incentive to create a top-down defined ‘socialist labour ethos’, the immediacy of work accidents created a contingent ebb and flow of productivity that was not easily plotted in a long-term plan (pp. 257–259). For instance, it became obvious from the early 1950s that, at the factory level, the budget for work accidents was one of the first budgets to end up overstretched, forcing managers to divert funds that had been earmarked for other welfare benefits (p. 257). On a deeper level, however, the issue was that the attempts to socialise the risk of work accidents ‘brought actuarial and insurance strategies onto the shop floor’, which effectively ‘altered the nature of the wage relationship by formally making the body of the worker, rather than labor power, the object of the employment contract’ (pp. 260–261). This clashed with the reality that workers in fact had to ‘artfully navigate’ an intricate maze that involved both the amorphous institutional infrastructure and a range of actors – medical offices, accounting offices, labour inspectors, trade union representatives, each with contingently defined interests. The existence of multiple porous boundaries essentially forced authorities to simultaneously suspect workers and state functionaries *and* to legitimise the critique and ‘public denunciation of work safety inspectors, union officials and sometimes even of workers themselves’ (p. 269).

Summing up, Marsha Siefert’s book impresses through a level of analytical clarity that transforms detailed and otherwise disconnected historical narratives into a rich and coherent conceptual map of com-

munist history. By drawing on the conceptual toolkit of global history, all chapters unearth new facets of pre-existing explanations and causal relationships regarding the intricacies of the state-labour relationship in socialist economies. By creating an open dialogue with the burgeoning literature on global labour, the book sends out the strong message that the historical development of labour relations in communist countries is far more than a story of ‘backwardness’.

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Maja Göpel: *Unsere Welt Neu Denken: Eine Einladung*

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In this ambitious book, the German economist and political scientist Maja Göpel gave herself a near-impossible task: to change the way we are thinking about our society and our role in the environment. By discussing